

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 IO-10 ISO-00 NEAE-00 SSO-00 NSCE-00

USIE-00 INRE-00 PM-04 H-02 INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05

PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 DHA-02 OC-05 CCO-00 SY-05

A-01 OPR-02 SCCT-01 USSS-00 AID-05 ACDA-05 SSM-03

SCA-01 OMB-01 EB-07 COME-00 AGR-05 TRSE-00 DOTE-00

FAA-00 /116 W

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O R 181345Z DEC 75

FM AMEMBASSY BEIRUT

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 7750

INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN NIACT IMMEDIATE

AMEMBASSY ATHENS

USINT BAGHDAD

AMEMBASSY CAIRO

AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS

AMCONSUL JERUSALEM

AMEMBASSY JIDDA

AMEMBASSY KUWAIT

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY MOSCOW

AMEMBASSY NICOSIA

AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMCONSUL STUTTGART

AMEMBASSY TEHRAN

AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV

USMISSION USUN NEW YORK

USCINCEUR VAIHINGEN GER

CINCUSNAVEUR LONDON UK

COMMSIXTHFLT

CTF SIX ZERO

CTF SIX ONE

CTF SIX TWO

CTG SIX ZERO PT TWO

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FOSIF ROTA SPAIN

FICEURLANT NORFOLK VA
DIA WASHDC
CIA WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L BEIRUT 15337

AMMAN ALSO FOR AMB GODLEY

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINS, PINT, LE
SUBJ: TEMPERATURE RISES ONCE AGAIN IN LEBANON

REF: BEIRUT 15297 (1347Z)

1. ONLY TWO DAYS AFTER APPARENT REMISSION WHICH HELD PROMISE THAT LEBANESE BODY POLITIC MIGHT ENJOY AT LEAST TEMPORARY RES-
PITE FROM INFECTIOUS CIVIL STRIFE, MOST LIFE SIGNS SHOW SHARP
DOWNWARD TURN DEC 18; COUNTRY ONCE AGAIN TEETERS ON VERGE OF
BECOMING BASKET CASE.

(A) AFTERMATH OF SEBNAY INCIDENT (REFTEL) CONTINUES TO HAVE
REPERCUSSIONS IN BEIRUT AND NEARBY AREAS OF THE SHOUF.
ATTACKS AND COUNTER-ATTACKS WERE REPORTED IN AND AROUND
BAABDA YESTERDAY AND INTO MORNING DEC 18. NEW AND SERIOUS
ELEMENT IN SITUATION IS EXTENSION OF ACTIVE CONFLICT INTO SHOUF
WHERE KAMAL JUMBLATT'S DRUZE ARE POWERFUL FACTOR.
JUMBLATT'S PSP MILITIAMEN STAGED SEVERAL RETALIATORY
ATTACKS ON CHRISTIAN CENTERS ALONG ROAD TO SOUK AL GHARB AND
AT KAHALE AND ALEY AND ARE ON ALERT IN BEIRUT. ALL HOT SPOTS
OUTSIDE EARSHOT OF EMBASSY EXPERIENCED AT LEAST SOME FIRING
IN LAST 24 HOURS, ALTHOUGH TRUCE IN HOTEL DISTRICT APPEARS TO
BE HOLDING AS OF 1300 HOURS DEC 18. NEW SPARK OR EVEN
MOMENTUM OF STRIFE ELSEWHERE COULD CHANGE SITUATION AROUND
CHANCERY INSTANTANEOUSLY. FIGHTING CONTINUES IN TRIPOLI
WHERE OPPOSING ELEMENTS ARE SAID TO HAVE ENGAGED DEC 17 IN
"TANK BATTLES" USING ARMORED VEHICLES TAKEN FROM SECURITY
FORCES. IN BEQA, SHIITES ARE REPORTEDLY ON WARPATH AGAINST
CHRISTIAN VILLAGES OF KAA AND RAS BAALBEK FOR ALLEGED
CHRISTIAN PROVOCATIONS.

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(B) HIGHER COORDINATION COMMITTEE CONTINUES ITS EFFORTS WITH
LEFTISTS APPARENTLY BACK ON BOARD, BUT SQUABBLES ABOUT SEBNAY
INCIDENT AND RESULTANT DOWNWARD SPIRAL OF THRUST/COUNTER-
THRUST DOMINATE PROCEEDINGS.

(C) PRES FRANGIE CAME FORTH WITH ADDITIONAL PERLS OF WISDOM
AT DEC 17 MEETING OF CABINET, TAKING ON THE PALESTINIANS (AS HE
HAD THE LEFT DURING THE DEC 10 SESSION OF THE COUNCIL OF

MINISTERS) AND CHARGING THE PALESTINIANS WITH NOT LIVING UP TO THE TERMS OF THEIR COMMITMENT TO ABIDE BY THE CAIRO AND MELKART AGREEMENTS AND STAY OUT OF INTERNAL POLITICS. BEFORE PRIMIN KARAME'S REBUTTAL, FRANGIE TOOK OCCASION TO PRAISE THE INITIATIVE OF THE SHAH OF IRAN IN CALLING FOR A MEETING OF ISLAMIC STATES TO DISCUSS LEBANON. HE ALSO EXPRESSED WARM APPRECIATION TO PRESIDENTS OF EGYPT AND FRANCE AND DWELT AT SOME LENGTH ON DEPTH AND BREADTH OF LEBANON'S RELATIONS WITH THOSE STATES. ACCORDING TO TEXT OF HIS REMARKS PUBLISHED DEC 18, FRANGIE MANAGED TO AVOID ANY REFERENCE TO SYRIA, DESPITE FACT THAT HIS PRIVATE SECRETARY INFORMED US DEC 17 THAT FRANGIE EXPECTED SYRIAN FONMIN KHADDAM TO VISIT LEBANON MOMENTARILY. PRESIDENT'S RECENT ORATORICAL OUTINGS HAVE MOST KNOWLEDGEABLE OBSERVERS LONGING FOR GOLDEN DAYS OF ROUNDS I THRU III WHEN NO ONE IN LEBANON SAW OR HEARD FRANGIE, EXCEPT HIS ZGHORTIOTE CRONIES.

(D) SAEB SALAM AND KAMAL JUMBLATT SEPARATELY ISSUED CALLS FOR THE RESIGNATION OF FRANGIE AND MININT CHAMOUN, THOUGH IT MUST BE SOURCE OF EMBARRASSMENT TO TWO MEN OF SUCH DIFFERENT TEMPERAMENT AND PHILOSOPHY THAT THEY AGREE ON THIS QUESTION.

(E) CHAMOUN AND 'ARAFAT HAVE STILL NOT MANAGED TO GET TOGETHER FOR THE MEETING ANNOUNCED TWO DAYS AGO. ACCOUNTS VARY REGARDING WHICH OF THE TWO IS THE RELUCTANT BRIDEGROOM, BUT FRANGIE'S ATTACK ON THE PLO WILL NOT RPT NOT SIMPLIFY TASK OF BRINGING CHAMOUN (WIDELY IDENTIFIED AS FRANGIE COLLABORATOR) INTO MEANINGFUL CONTACT WITH ABU AMMAR. SHAFIQ AL HOUT, DIRECTOR OF BEIRUT PLO OFFICE, DESCRIBED LEBANESE MARONITES AS "MADMEN" TO VISITOR DEC 17. IT IS NOT CLEAR WHETHER SHAFIQ'S VIEWS, UTTERED BEFORE ANNOUNCEMENT OF FRANGIE'S BOMBSHELL IN THE CABINET, REPRESENT A NEW AND CONFIDENTIAL

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GENERAL PLO DISENCHANTMENT WITH THE MARONITES OR HIS OWN REACTIONS.

(F) FINALLY, IN THE SO-WHAT-ELSE-IS-NEW DEPT, THE PARLIAMENTARY COMMITTEE HAS BEEN UNABLE TO DATE TO AGREE ON THE RECOMMENDATIONS OUTLINED IN REFTTEL. THE DATE FOR THE RELEASE OF THEIR REPORT HAS BEEN SET BACK SEVERAL TIMES NOW AND LOCAL WAGS ARE BETTING THAT COMMITTEE'S DELIBERATIONS, WHICH HAVE APPARENTLY ALTERNATED BETWEEN PRIVATE DINING ROOMS OF CARLTON AND BRISTOL HOTELS, WILL NOT END UNTIL THOSE LUXURY HOSTELRIES SUFFER THE FATE OF THE HOLIDAY INN AND ST. GEORGES.

2. COMMERCIAL ACTIVITY IN SOME NEIGHBORHOODS CONTINUES TO IMPROVE NONETHELESS WITH SHOPS OPEN.

THE CENTRAL BUSINESS DISTRICT, HOWEVER, IS NEARLY DESERTED, WHILE THE HAMRA RETAIL AREA SEEMS TO BE TRYING TO APPROACH OF ITS NORMAL TEMPO. A RANGE OF GOODS AND FOODSTUFFS IS GENERALLY AVAILABLE BUT AT PRICES ABOUT 15-35 PERCENT ABOVE NORMAL. BAKERIES ARE OPERATING NEAR NORMAL.

3. TWO SHIPS HAVE ARRIVED IN THE PAST FEW DAYS CARRYING A TOTAL OF 3,150 TONS OF EGYPTIAN RICE TO ADD TO ALREADY AMPLE STORES, BUT THEY REMAIN UNLOADED AS THE PORT IS STILL INACTIVE. A POTENTIAL PROBLEM IS THE ABSENCE OF SYRIAN LABORERS WHO PROVIDE THE BULK OF PORT WORKERS.

4. BANKS REMAIN CLOSED WITH NO KNOWN REOPENING DATE. DEALERS EXCHANGE RATE FOR DOLLARS IS APPROXIMATELY 2.42-2.44 SELLING AND 2.46-2.48 BUYING.

5. THE REPAIR TO THE PETROLEUM MARINE LINE AT DORA, EXPECTED TO BE COMPLETED YESTERDAY, WAS NOT DONE WHEN THE REPAIR CREW REFUSED TO GO TO THE JOB BECAUSE OF BAD SECURITY (DESPITE AN ARMY ESCORT) AND BAD WEATHER. THE JOB IS NOW SCHEDULED TO BE COMPLETED TOMORROW DEC 19. A TANKER DESTINED FOR BEIRUT IS TO BE LOADED WITH 16,000 TONS OF GASOLINE AND GAS OIL TODAY AT TRIPOLI.

6. TRUCKS DISTRIBUTING GAS OIL FOR HEATING WERE EVIDENT TODAY WITH PRIORITY GIVEN TO BAKERIES, HOSPITALS, AND HOTELS.
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BUTANE GAS FOR COOKING IS STILL IN SHORT SUPPLY AND GASOLINE IS NOT YET AVAILABLE FROM RETAIL STATIONS. HOWEVER, IT IS ESTIMATED THAT SUPPLIES COULD BE FULLY REPLENISHED AFTER ONE WEEK PROVIDED THE SECURITY SITUATION CONTINUES TO PERMIT INTRA-CITY MOVEMENT OF DISTRIBUTORS' TRUCKS.

7. AIR FLIGHTS LEAVING BEIRUT ARE FULL OF CHRISTMAS TRAVELERS AND PERSONS SEEKING SAFER AREAS. INCOMING PASSENGER LOADS ARE LIGHT.
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